



NEBRASKA STATE ACCOUNTABILITY – Reading (NeSA-R)

Item Development Style Guide

ITEM STEM

- If the stem is a complete sentence that asks a question, punctuate it with a question mark (?).
- If the stem is the beginning of a sentence and the answer completes the sentence, use no punctuation at the end of the stem.
- Items related to informational text use the term “passage.”
- Items related to narrative text use the term “story.”
- If there is a genre item in the item set which uses the word “story,” the entire set of items will use “passage,” not “story” in item stems. The same is true of “poem” if use of the word “poem” clues a genre item.
- Headings will be in boldface when in a stem but will not be in quotation marks.
- A writer should be referred to as “author” for passages and stories. A writer should be referred to as “poet” for poems unless the word “poet” clues a genre item.
- When referencing a section of the text in an item, use “paragraph” for narratives and informational texts and “stanza” or “line” for poems.

ANSWER CHOICES

- When options are complete sentences they should begin with a capital letter and end with appropriate punctuation.
- If the options complete a sentence that begins in the stem, they should begin with lowercase letters and end with the appropriate punctuation.
- Responses may be arranged in ascending (or other relational) order, as ordered in an accompanying graphic, or arranged in any other logical order appropriate to other contents.
- There will be no quotation marks around passage quotations used in response options. However, quotes in the stem will have quotation marks (Smart Quotes).
No italics or boldface will be used in response options when they involve alternate title or heading choices for an item. However, italics and boldface will be used in the stems where needed and in options with normal text, as needed.
- Item numbers and ABCD have periods.

TECHNOLOGY ITEM TYPES

- Do not use verbiage applicable to only one operational system (avoid *click*, *drag-and-drop*, etc.)
 - For Hot Spot items, use the words *select* or *choose*.
 - For Drag-and-Drop items, use the words *move* or *place*.
- For an EBSR item, always include the instructions: “This question has two parts. Answer Part A, and then answer Part B.” Boldface “**Part A**” above the first half of the item. Boldface “**Part B**” above the second half of the item.
- For Multiple-Select items, provide the number of options the student should choose in the stem (*Select two sentences from....that best support the inference that...*)

EMPHASIS WORDS

- May use boldface to emphasize vocabulary words in reading passages and/or item.
- May use boldface to offset paragraph headings within a passage.
- Boldface words containing the targeted prefix, suffix, base, root, or part of speech in the item only, **not** in the passage. The actual prefix or suffix will have a hyphen and be boldface in the stem. Boldface actual root or base word in stem.
- Boldface vocabulary words in stem and in passage when assessing meaning through context, synonyms, or antonyms. Stem may refer to paragraph in which target word is used in passage.
- When a multiple meaning word (MMW) is included in quoted text in the stem, only bold the MMW in the stem. If the stem directs the reader to look at how the word is used in the passage, bold the MMW in the stem and passage.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Boldface instructions.

Read the following passage/sentence/paragraph and answer question 24.
Read the following passage and answer questions 24–27. (use en dash)
Use the chart below to answer the question.

COMMA USAGE

- Use commas in a series, including prior to the final conjunction.

apples, oranges, and lemons
- Use commas following introductory phrases.

On the other hand, my father was also a carpenter.
- Use commas between independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction, even if the clauses are short.

I missed the bus, so I had to walk home.
- Use commas to set off appositives.

April, my sister’s best friend, plays soccer for her school’s team.

- Use a comma after each item in a geographical location, address, or date that is made up of two or more parts.
They're going to Paris, France, for their vacation.
The invitation was sent to 937 14th Street, Miami, Florida.
The graduation took place on May 12, 2008, in the high school gymnasium.

CAPITALIZATION

- Titles such as president, governor, mayor, etc., are not capitalized unless they immediately precede a name (*President Lincoln, the president of the United States*).
- *Earth* (no *the*) should appear capitalized when referring to the planet and lowercased when referring to soil (*Earth's atmosphere, digging in the earth*). Note: When used in a permissioned passage, the items will contain the same usage as in the permissioned passage.
- Do not capitalize *sun* and *moon* except when those names are used in connection with other bodies of the solar system. (*The sun is shining this morning. Earth is the third planet from the Sun. It takes the Moon about 27.32 days to go around Earth once. I heard there is going to be a full moon tonight.*) Note: When used in a permissioned passage, the items will contain the same usage as in the permissioned passage.
- Names of governmental bodies are capitalized unless used as an adjective or generic term (*United States Congress, Congress, congressional; the Supreme Court, the Court; Arizona Supreme Court, U.S. Court of Appeals, court of appeals*).
- The four seasons are lowercased.
- Words such as *not, or, and*, should be in all-caps to offset within an item stem.

APOSTROPHE

- Use an apostrophe before abbreviated names of decades and centuries (*'40s*), but omit before the *s* in non-abbreviated forms (*1800s*).
- Place an apostrophe before the *s* to indicate a singular possessive (*the boy's bike*) and after the *s* to indicate a plural possessive (*the boys' bikes*). If a noun is singular but already ends in *s*, place the apostrophe after the *s* (*Mr. Jones' bike*).

ELLIPSIS

- Use one space between the text and periods and between the periods themselves.
- Use three periods at the beginning or middle of a sentence when the following sentence is omitted. (*We abandoned them . . . because*).

HYPHENATION

- Do **not** hyphenate words in an item stem or option to fill white space.
- Use an **en** dash (slightly longer than a hyphen) for dates, page ranges, and negative signs in numbers. (*The information can be found on pages 62–65*).

- Use an **em** dash (slightly longer than an **en** dash) when there is an abrupt change in a sentence.
Note: There should be no space on either side of an **em** dash (*Nobody—not even the company’s president—could have anticipated the merger.*)
- Hyphenate compound words when they are used as adjectives and appear before the noun.
I play the violin in my school’s instrumental-music program. I enjoy listening to instrumental music.

ITALICS

- *Italicize* the title of the passage within an item, titles of books, movies, magazines, paintings, names of ships, etc.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Use smart quotes in text; use straight quotes to symbolize these units: foot, inch, hour, minute.
- Internet is capitalized and website is one word and is lowercase.
- Use United States (n.) and U.S. (adj.); use periods in the abbreviation U.S.
- Clock times are written in lowercase with periods (*a.m. or p.m.*); BC/AD/BP are full-sized capital letters without periods.
- Avoid using overused words, such as *a lot, very, nice, thing*.
- Avoid beginning sentences with *There is* ____, *There was* ____, or *There are* ____.
- Avoid using contractions wherever possible.
- Spell out numbers from one to nine and any numbers beginning a sentence. Use numerals when referring to paragraphs within a passage.
- For issues not addressed in these guidelines, consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* or *The American Heritage College Dictionary* for clarification.
- For context vocabulary items, target word should be at least one to two grade levels above the level being tested; answer choices should be grade level or below. Synonyms should be at grade level; answer choices should be at or below grade level.